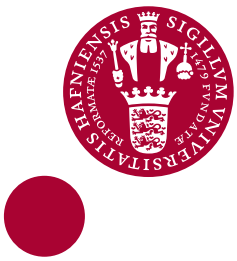

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Published in:
Food Ethics

DOI:
10.1007/s41055-019-00044-6

Publication date:
2019

Document version
Peer reviewed version

This is a post-print version of an article published in
Food Ethics by Springer
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When the working environment is bad, you take it out on the animals – Lessons from employees on Danish farms[1]

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Abstract

Little is known about how employees on husbandry farms perceive animal welfare and the factors influencing the relationship between them and the animals they engage with in their daily work. Reporting the findings of qualitative interviews with 23 employees on five Danish farms (mink, dairy and pig production), this paper describes how the employees viewed animal welfare, and discusses how they dealt with animal welfare issues in their daily work. Four distinct rationales for animal welfare were identified. 1) Animal welfare was supported by concerns about production and health, and could be negotiated – especially when it came to the ability of the animals to perform natural behaviour. 2) Animal welfare was connected with the working conditions on the farm. 3) The employees' views about animal welfare were affected by working conditions over which they had no influence. 4) An awareness of the condition of the animals was seen as obviously needed in relation to production, but a deeper attachment to some animals was also seen. A specific challenge is presented by the increasingly diverse workforce in farming, with one third of the employees on Danish farms coming from abroad. If farm owners are not able to integrate these employees, there is a risk of creating a second-tier of foreign workers who are isolated. Furthermore, it was seen that negative working conditions can be taken out on the animals, or that animal welfare can come to be seen as unimportant as compared with human welfare.

Keywords: Animal welfare, employees, ethical assumption, livestock, perception

Introduction

There is a growing awareness both of the role of farmers in maintaining the welfare of their livestock and of the range of ethical views today's farmers have on animal welfare (de Rooij et al. 2010). We know that livestock welfare is not determined solely by physical features of the systems in which farm animals are raised, such as freedom of movement and climate conditions. The practical management of the systems also plays an important role, and the farmers' attitudes to animal welfare and their participation in welfare

[1] The reference of the printed version is:
Anneberg, I., & Sandøe, P. (2019). When the working environment is bad, you take it out on the animals: How employees on Danish farms perceive animal welfare. *Food Ethics* 3: 21-34.
The definitive version is available at
https://doi.org/10.1007/s41055-019-00044-6

schemes are therefore important factors affecting animal welfare (Bock and van Huik, 2007). However, in modern intensive animal production, with growing farm sizes and increased specialisation in different aspects of production, many of the tasks involved in farming are carried out, not by farm owners, but farmworkers.

In Denmark, where the farming landscape has traditionally been dominated by middle-sized family farms, farmworkers have tended to be young local people with a farming background, many of whom aspired to own their own farm. As a result, differences between the farmer's and the farmworker's approaches to husbandry have not been very significant. In other words, there has been little reason to suspect that the management practices of the farmer and those of the farmworkers differ. However, in Denmark and other European countries with intensive agriculture, the situation has changed in recent years. Following developments in the labour market driven by employment and wage opportunities, migrant agricultural workers have become essential in those countries (Siudek & Aldona, 2016).

In Denmark,[2] the recruitment of young local people and family members as farmworkers has decreased, as has the total number of employees and the number of farms (Anonymous 1, 2, 2018). Today, farms often hire workers of various nationalities. Of these, about a third (38%) come from Eastern Europe, mostly from Ukraine, Romania and Belarus; about a third of these foreign farmworkers are not educated within agriculture. The majority of non-Danish farm workers work on farms with pigs or minks (Anneberg and Sørensen 2016). No specific courses on animal welfare need to be completed in order to be employed on Danish farms with animals. Most of the skilled Danish employees are educated at agricultural colleges, however, and some have further education in economics and management as well, and typically skilled farmworkers also have education and training in animal welfare (Anneberg et al 2016). By contrast, very little is known about the educational background of employees from Eastern Europe.

It is recognised that the new patterns of recruitment require a fresh approach to animal welfare. Increasingly, efforts are being made in Denmark to reach the diverse workforce with offers of training in health and other aspects of animal welfare. Online courses have been developed and offered to farm employees in Danish, English and languages from Eastern Europe (Anonymous 3 2018). Farmers' organisations have tried to come up with new tools to target a workforce in which many workers have no, or limited, knowledge of the way pigs or dairy cows are managed in intensive production. A Danish questionnaire to farm owners about how they view the need for further education for their employees has shown that the owners do not think further education is needed for the Danish part of the workforce, but do see vocational education as a need for the rising numbers of foreign workers (Anneberg and Sørensen 2016). It has also been reported in the media that farm owners and managers lack education in management (Lønsmann & Jørgensen 2017), and farmers' organisations have tried to target this problem by offering a number of educational opportunities (Anonymous 4 2018).

The role of farmers in managing animal welfare has been studied in some depth. Research has shown that farmers tend to equate animal welfare with basic animal health and access to necessities such as food and water (Te Velde et al. 2002; Vanhonacker et al. 2008). It has also been shown that students at Danish agricultural colleges explain their understanding of farm animal welfare with reference to production, and take the desired level of animal welfare to be determined by economic considerations. However, students also justify animal welfare requirements with reference to the needs of the animals and describe the neglect of animal welfare as a violation of animals' needs and rights (Lassen et al. 2016).

Very little research has been undertaken on the way employees on farms with livestock perceive animal welfare and what factors influence the relationship between the employees and the animals they work with

[2] It is estimated that there are approx. 40,000 Danish farms (all types), with a total of approx. 30,000 employees (Anonymous 1,2, 2018); about a quarter of the farms specialise in livestock production. A Danish survey with 1119 farmers answering a questionnaire about their employees showed that the average number of employees were 3,9 per farm, with the highest average (5,6) at pig farms (Anneberg and Sørensen, 2016).

on a daily basis. Hardly anything is known about how farmworkers affect farm animals in practice when the nationalities of the workers are mixed and many different languages are being spoken. In addition, it is not known how the fact that employees have different kinds of education, and the fact that farm owners are not always educated in management or leadership, affect the management, and thereby the welfare, of farm animals.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how farm employees perceive animal welfare; to map the ways in which they deal with animal welfare issues in daily work situations; to connect any findings obtained with the dilemma between animal welfare and production efficiency; and to explain how social relations and other aspects of the work environment on farms affect workers' attitudes to animal welfare.

Materials and methods

The paper draws on a qualitative study of employees (N=23) on five farms in Denmark involved in mink, dairy and pig production. See table 1.

Table 1. Description of the 23 employees participating in the study

Age	21-53
Gender	Female: 6 Male: 17
Countries represented	Denmark (10), Ukraine (6) Romania (4), Estonia (2), Eritrea (1)
Average payment per hour	Between 11 and 20 EURO plus extra during weekends and overtime
Educational Background	Skilled farmer (12) Apprentice (2) Work ability testing (2) Unskilled in relation to farming (6) Veterinarian (1)
Average work experience on the five farms	Between 6 months and 10 years

The farms were chosen to ensure diversity in size, employees (nationality, gender) and animal species. The study comprised interviews and observations on all five farms. All interviews followed an interview guide which included a section on the employee's background in work with farm animals, with a particular focus on his or her understanding of welfare among pigs, cattle and mink. Besides this, employees were asked about their wages, working hours and experiences with the working environment on Danish farms, and whether they saw links between these experiences and animal welfare. This was followed by a section with questions about the employee's relation to agriculture, daily experience on the farm, social relationships at work and outside work, and perceptions of animal production. The guide also included a ranking exercise involving the so-called "five freedoms". Employees were asked to discuss animal welfare issues in relation to the ranking. This was followed by a section in which employees were asked to identify and discuss aspects of pig, dairy and mink production that they found problematic for animal welfare. Finally, the employees were asked about their attitudes to Danish animal welfare legislation, and whether legislation affected their daily work on the farm.

Interviews with employees from Eastern Europe were conducted in English if the employees were content with that, or (sometimes) in Danish. For practical reasons, interpreters were not used. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Nvivo software was used in the data analysis. The analysis involved a thematic coding. This was followed by a meaning-condensation in which essences were extracted

from the coded sections (Malterud 2012). Finally, patterns in the condensations were identified and described.

Participant observations were made by first author at all of the farms for up to six days. The participation involved following, and getting involved in, the employee's daily work. The observer participated in milking the cows, feeding the calves, moving the sows, feeding the pigs, and cleaning the mink cages, and also took part in meetings, work planning and breaks. Employment in the field is a methodology which makes it possible to observe social interaction. It gives the participant first-hand knowledge of the ways in which common issues arise and are dealt with. It can also teach the participant to mirror local behaviour, and enable him or her to engage in, and understand, local roles (Hastrup 2010; Kaul 2004).

Results

The observations showed that the concept of animal welfare was well-known, and often referred to, by the employees. It was used especially in the discussion of production results and health problems, but also when discussions arose about how the world outside the farm understood farming and in relation to market demand. Observations also showed that everyday animal welfare issues – e.g. whether to use stomach tubes to deliver raw milk to new-born calves, whether to manage pain when castrating piglets, and whether to use extra time to give straw to pigs – were recognised by employees.

When elaborating their points of view, and arguing for the need for animal welfare, the employees referred to four distinct welfare rationales. 1) Animal welfare was supported with reference to concerns about production and health, but it could be negotiated – especially when it came to issues concerning the ability of the animals to perform natural behaviour. 2) Animal welfare was connected with the working conditions on the farm – e.g. a negative relationship between workers and managers, and the former's feeling that their work was not properly appreciated, could create a worse situation for the animals. 3) Employees' views about animal welfare – e.g. the imposition of pain or distress on animals – were affected by working conditions over which they had no influence which they felt they just had to get used to. 4) An awareness of the condition of the animals was regarded as something that was obviously necessary in relation to production, but a deeper attachment to some animals was also observed; however, a dilemma arose because daily work also necessitated separation.

Production is vital, whereas the ability to perform natural behaviour can be negotiated

One of the employees referred to fodder and water as *cornerstones* – i.e. what everything builds on when it comes to animal welfare. Most of the employees saw fodder and water as central. Together with a safe environment to live in, and keeping the animal healthy, fodder and water were seen as more important for production than meeting the behavioural needs of the animals. Indeed, meeting behavioural needs, e.g. by loose-housing sows, could affect the economic viability of the farm negatively.

> *Having the dry sows loose during oestrus increases the risk of having to return to oestrus. Therefore, it is about a financial risk. It has to be in balance – and after all, keeping them locked in the box in that unit is not (necessary) for a long time. (…) Where I work now, I can see they do enjoy to be loose in deep bedding in that period, so I guess it matters, but where I worked before, they were not loose during oestrus, and I never thought about it.(16)*

Having animals like minks in captivity was seen as safer for the animals. Not being stressed, living in comfort, and being given fodder, were perceived as preconditions for fur production, but also as elements in a good animal life.

> *They (the minks) are not stressed about anything. They have everything they need – food, toys, a shelf (…) and they can still express themselves. If we do see stereotypies, it relates to stress, and then we do not keep them. They are put to sleep. It is seldom, but we do see minks that cannot handle this life. Like sometimes, people cannot handle it. Of course, it is a big change for them compared to nature where they can hunt. Hunting is the only thing they cannot do in a cage. However, they can run. It is like humans doing fitness, when they jump around. This is how I see it; others may have a different opinion. (19)*

Still, employees at one mink farm often talked about the importance of making some sort allowance for what they saw as normal behaviour in the minks. Some consideration had to be shown for the animals for the sake of production, and minks were mating with each other and having pups like in nature.

> *We also try to avoid noise that they do not know, otherwise the females will be scared and then they try to move the pups – so we really have to be calm working around them. Still, the noise of the machine bringing fodder they know and are familiar with. (6)*

Negotiation over the advantages and disadvantages of natural living for the animals was also observed on a dairy farm. One employee said that the cows walked differently in the indoor environment from the way they did when out on pasture, and that the farm's veterinarian had told him that none of the cows in the stable walked normally. Mentioning in the interview that nothing about the dairy cows was "normal" any longer, he added that the natural life for a cow was no longer relevant.

> *Because, well, it is not normal that they today give 70 kilos of milk, is it? It is not normal but happens because we have boosted them to do this. With our expertise. It has been a long time ago since a cow was like an aurochs; we have passed that long ago. I do not think that we should look at that at all. (10)*

Different understandings of natural living were discussed by the employees. For one of the workers, natural living related mainly to having enough space – and he connected space with output. Giving dairy cows space would help to optimise yield. In principle, he liked to see the cows on pasture, but at the same time he felt the dairy cows in free stalls had an acceptable level of freedom as long as they were given enough space. He also emphasised that for the employees it was a lot easier to look after cows in a 100% indoor system and not to have to collect them from a field. His preference for putting the cows on pasture was weighed against what he, as an employee, felt was most practical in daily work.

Another employee felt that natural living was impossible because the animals – in this case, pigs – were part of a production system. He did not consider this a problem.

> *We do oppress their nature or normal behaviour as soon as they are indoors (…). However, it does not seem to bother them a lot, from my point of view. They feel all right, it seems. They would not make so many piglets if they did not feel well. (3)*

In dairy farming, a dilemma was felt to arise when employees tube-fed the new-born calves with raw milk on a regular basis. Some of the employees disliked this procedure and would rather have used a bottle or let the calf feed directly from the udder, but working conditions, and expectations around efficient (or, as the workers put it, "effective") calf-feeding, made this impossible.

> *It has something to do with being effective. When we get many calves, it is really hard. They must have their raw milk within 1-2 hours, and that would take us 3-4 hours for each calf to make them drink what they need. Using the tube is much more effective (…) I would prefer to see the cow and calf together, but it is not up to me to decide. The owner*

is the producer. Sucking the [udder of the] cow is what I see as normal, but on a farm like this you can drop this idea (…) It is nice for the calf but … (2)

Catering to the needs of the animals was sometimes seen as something that is in conflict with the needs, or preferences, of humans. An employee gave the example of a mink farm. Danish welfare legislation requires mink farmers to provide minks with a shelf in their cages to jump on to and pipes to hide in. The employee said that these regulations, catering to the needs of the animals, made additional tasks necessary, but that the farmworkers did not always feel that they were rewarded for the extra work they undertook.

I am not being paid higher wages, even though I need to do extra work, when new regulations are introduced around mink welfare. The wages are the same, but I have to work more. Is this welfare? (21)

Negative working conditions affect animal welfare

A farm employee's feeling that his or her work is appreciated by the manager, or valued by colleagues, may have an impact on animal welfare, as may his or her impression that the working environment is one in which there is a positive atmosphere. This emerged as a theme among the employees in several situations. Some employees mention the importance of being able to make a mistake without being criticised by the boss.

It is an important lesson that I have learned where I work now. That it is not bad to make a mistake. It is bad if you do not learn from it. In the country where I came from, a mistake could really be the end of the world. That is worse, because it makes you afraid, and then you start making more mistakes. (2)

Working without feeling appreciated was mentioned several times as a problem that could lead to negative impacts on the animals.

Perhaps you get frustrated. You feel that you work without being acknowledged. You get your payment but this little extra… You really want to be acknowledged when you contribute to improving things (on the farm). In addition, if you are in a conflict with your boss, then you might feel that the boss is not the best to target. So instead, you target the animals, you go and spoil a tractor, or (…) I think humans react like this. Frustrations will grow, and all you want is to go home, sleep, eat and do something completely different. (20)

A bad social climate could affect animal welfare more directly, as the animals might respond to the mood of the employees.

In case(s where) there is lack of confidence between me and a colleague or between me and the management, it could be a real catastrophe. In case(s where) you cannot trust each other getting the job done in the way you agreed, then things might start not to be done at all. You might then think: well, she has to find out herself what is wrong with that calf! Therefore, instead of saving the calf, it might end up dying. That of course influences animal welfare. (10)

If you are in bad mood, it affects the animals, but if you feel well, like the place where I am now, you also share your good feelings and your behaviour with the animals. The

> *animals will feel it immediately if you are upset or angry, even though you do not talk about it and are just quiet. They sense it, and they get worried. (11)*

The situation of an employee from abroad, who is therefore sensitive about the lack of social life or bad working conditions, was described in statements like this one:

> *I worked a place where the house we lived in was terrible, bad windows and doors that could not be closed, no hot water. I had the feeling they did not like me, but also there was a really bad situation around the animals, bad stable, too little fodder for the sows, a thousand of them, but still they had to be fed manually while the owner just had access to his own kitchen and could eat whenever he liked. A lot of the sows were really lean and could not stand by themselves. Nobody acted. We were always in lack of medications and the owner was financially under pressure and passed this pressure on to the employees (…). He also suggested paying me without giving information to the tax service and so on. (23)*

Some workers confided that they had feelings of isolation, as foreign employees. Language problems, and getting the feeling that you were part of a problem, were sometimes sources of pressure for workers with a foreign background. Still, when it came to the handling of the animals, most employees, whether Danish or not, agreed that conflicts in this area were caused by bad management, myths about the culture of foreign employees, and too little time being given to agricultural training. An employee from Eastern Europe expressed it like this when he was confronted with the myth that employees from abroad were not able to think independently.

> *These stories about us not being able to think independently – I guess they have come forward because they are convenient to some owners. Makes them able to keep control and simply give orders: You do this, you do that (…) I also think this has to do with some Danish employees needing to feel superior. (14)*

On the other hand, more benevolent motivations were sometimes found to lie behind the tendency on farms to treat employees from abroad differently. According to one manager, seeing foreign employees as "all the same" was a serious mistake. This was not a way to treat people.

> *Of course, they are not the same. They are very different. One needs (to be given a) long time to learn and another can start on his own immediately. I think it has to do with self-confidence, and that is also the case with Danish employees. It is also about building up a relationship, not keeping a distance. Obviously, many are here to get an income, but so are the rest of us. They have just travelled a long way to do it. (6)*

Causing the animals pain or distress – and becoming accustomed to it

Although the farm animals were viewed primarily through the lens of production, the employees also talked about other perspectives, and sometimes they discussed the importance of preventing suffering. Some described the handling of animals in ways that cause pain or other forms of suffering, and the practice of shouting at animals, as very negative.

> *Suffering, for them (cows)? Well, they have to be free of that. Like, for instance, problems with the hooves or lameness, because it means pain. In addition, they must be free of*

fear. For instance, fearing being beaten up by a bigger cow (…) So we use special areas for them if they need peace and quiet. (10)

Where pain was concerned, employees referred to the dilemma that they were placed in because they themselves had to cause pain to the animals – e.g. when castrating or tail-docking piglets. But although castration was a job the workers on pig farms indicated they disliked, they also talked about becoming accustomed to it. They felt it was necessary to overcome one's reservations about the practice to stay in this job.

Employees often debated whether husbandry practices like tail docking and castration were painful. A young male employee was sure it was extremely painful and related his aversion to the practice to his own status as a man. But he also felt that he simply had to cope with this part of his job, even though he was convinced that pigs could feel pain.

Employee: I did not like the process of castration in the beginning. Not at all. I guess it is because you are a man yourself. However, now I have started to conclude that this is the way it is.

Interviewer: Did you think about quitting the job because you disliked it?

Employee: No, no, I never thought about it like that. I did not get so far out (…) and the screaming, after all it only screams when you do the cutting. As soon as this is over and the piglet is back in the pen, it does not scream any longer. I guess it still feels pain but the screaming has stopped.

Interviewer: So, you have got used to it?

Employee: Yes, I do think it's just something you have to overcome. (5)

A young female employee related this unpleasant part of her job to the fact that Danish consumers want to avoid pungent boar meat. She felt it was part of her job to cater to this consumer preference. In addition, she had been told that piglets do not feel pain in the first week.

An experienced worker had heard a similar explanation in agricultural college, but still felt that modifying the animals by castrating them was wrong.

I feel that there is a reason why they are created the way they are. In addition, it must be essential to change them as little as possible. And I do feel that it is annoying to take part in this. (13)

The same employee concluded, however, that this dilemma – whether or not to castrate piglets – was not an issue on the farm where he worked, as he felt that he could not change the situation anyway. Their inability to manoeuvre within the framework of conditions in which they were required to work encouraged employees to accept tasks which caused the animals pain or discomfort, or modified them, as a daily duty of their job.

Connecting with the animals, and feeling attached

Trying to observe, and connect with, each individual animal, even though one was working with several hundred, seemed important to some employees. This attitude sometimes related to productivity. At other times, it had more to do with the well-being of the employee. A young male worker revealed that he had noticed that the sows had "a will of their own", and that some of them would never let him take command –

which in turn meant that, when he was handling them, he had to consider their individuality. Cooperation with the animals, and handling them without stress with an awareness that it often became more problematic if you became frustrated or aggressive, was felt to be a key element of good husbandry.

One employee showed the first author a photo of what she saw as a perfect line of piglets, lying close as "spoons in a drawer" – a photo which reminded her of a man lying close to a woman. She explained that observations like this made her fond of her work, and she was reminded how, on this special day, she did not bring her camera phone, but had to run to the office to pick it up, because she wanted the perfect scene to be captured for ever. She also remembered another pig, born with a figure on its head like the shape of a heart, and that she had noticed it because it was St Valentine's Day.

Another employee confided that she had named one of the piglets "Fighter".

> *I gave the piglet its name because it was so small when it was born, and I was sure that coming back the next day it would be dead. However, when I saw it again, it had fought its way to the best teat at the sow's udder. Therefore, it was very confident, really. Nevertheless, well, it has moved on now, to (be with) the slaughter pigs. (8)*

However, workers also mentioned that many of the sows looked the same, and that it was therefore difficult to separate them from each other. They said they noted numbers of piglets born alive and how many litters a sow had had in order to separate one sow from another. Employees in the sow stable were convinced that the sows responded differently to different people entering the pen, and that they always greeted the sow in the pen next door by sniffing towards each other.

Being attached, and close, to production animals was seldom mentioned in this study, but it was clear that it occurred, especially with dairy cows. Some employees described a feeling that the cows were very observant not only of other cows, but also of the moods of people. Mild and gentle cows were sometimes compared to dogs. When a worker called the name of a cow before milking time, the cow would come over immediately and liked to have her head scratched.

> *I had this cow on a farm where, if I felt sad, she would always come to me and put her head on my shoulder – staying with me like a whole minute. Just staying there. And whenever we came to take out other cows for slaughter, she would fight against us, she became angry and violent. Because she knew, we were taking her friends away to die. (11)*

The employee telling this story had given a name to a favourite cow, one in a herd of 500, but at the same time he stressed that the owner of the farm was unaware of his affection for the animal. He knew that the cow could be taken away any time, and he did not want to stand out as sensitive. However, looking after the calves, and spending time making them confident, was something the farm owner allowed him to do, he felt. In fact, building relationships with the animals was said to be important on this particular farm.

> *Yes, we have to do that, make relations. When you feed the calves and a calf is weak, you have to play with it to make her gentle, not making her fearful, and you must not be too violent to her (in trying) to make her drink. Because then they are also fearful when they grow up. (11)*

However, feeling too attached to the animals was seen as a problem by some of the employees. One employee explained that she really liked one of the boars, and that the boar felt safe when she came near and liked to have his back scratched. However, the manager had warned her not to become too close with the boar.

Employee: He told me that it could be too much with this relation, because he did not want, when he himself came into the pen, that the boar came too close. He had to handle it, letting it into a gilt or a sow, and they were the ones the boar should show interest towards.

Interviewer: So, you had to stop being too friendly to him?

Employee: Yes, there has to be a balance, as the manager expressed it. He wanted to be able to trust the boars, so I do talk to them to make them feel safe but I also try to hold back, because they must not be "hygge-animals". ('hygge' in Danish, i.e. cosy) (16)

In a similar vein, another employee said that he felt that building up relationships with the animals could be "too romantic". He described himself as "very unromantic" when it came to connecting with special animals, and he firmly rejected the idea of being attached to any of the dairy cows, although he acknowledged that he needed to know which one gave the highest yield. Still, when thinking about it, he did remember certain things.

Employee: 'Well, I am so unromantic that it is creepy. Some colleagues do remember individual animals, but it does not say me anything. Still, I have a cow over there who gives 70 litres of milk, and I look to her every day. And then this cow, 4942, had a bad leg, a leg which I myself got fixed again (…), which is really satisfactory. I used a day on her where I should have been off early. Still, I do not have difficulties sending them to slaughter.

Interviewer: Even not after having given huge amounts of milk for years?

Employee: No, because when we send them to slaughter it is because they do not give that much any longer.' (10)

The same employee remembered how affected he was when, as a child, he had seen a calf he had a connection with being strangulated in an accident with a railing. This incident gave him a feeling that "anything can happen", and he stressed several times that to him life, both in private and at work with the animals, was about being realistic.

Discussion

To a certain extent, employees on Danish farms have the same understanding of farm animal welfare as that witnessed among farm owners and students at agricultural colleges (Lassen et al. 2016). On this understanding, welfare is important because it improves production, and the desired level of welfare is determined by economic considerations. A pig that grows well, or a dairy cow with a high yield, must be animals with 'good welfare'. It may be important for employees to cater to the needs of the animals for the sake of production, and therefore 'natural needs' can be negotiated. Sometimes they are relevant for production and, on that basis, they were defended by the employees – e.g. the provision of sufficient space for dairy cows in the stables. Aspects of 'naturalness', like a sow's need to root or build a nest, are sometimes negotiated, because the employee lacks the time to attend to them or is working on a farm where attending to the relevant need (e.g. by providing straw) is not seen as valuable. The idea that naturalness matters because it is a key value expressed by consumers (Lassen et al., 2006) was not touched upon in these interviews.

The findings of this in this study suggest that working conditions are central when it comes to looking after animal welfare. For the employees animal welfare was very much reflected in the conditions they were given on the farm, and was related to the workers' hours, wages, social life, and negative or positive management. Employees do not themselves take key decisions about their daily lives with the animals. The owner, or farm

manager, makes these decisions, and workers are expected to respect those decisions, and to work with the rules or values they are based on. An example of this was the case where employees were tube-feeding new born calves even though legislation in Denmark[3] states that this must not be done routinely. When the employees talked about this issue, they did not see their conduct as freely chosen. Tube feeding was effective, and because they were employed to milk the cows in as many as three shifts a day, they simply did not have time to feed the calves raw milk by bottle.

The employees talked about the effectiveness of farm practices a good deal, but they saw it as a value set by the owner, not something that could be negotiated. Working conditions can be laid down in legislation, but in practice it is the farm owner who defines the conditions and the values. It emerged from the interviews that not all of the employees felt that it was possible to question or discuss these conditions or dilemmas, even when they had a feeling that something was wrong. Porcher (2011) has claimed that human and animal conditions ought to be, but are rarely, considered together. She maintains that suffering spreads from animals to human beings, and can cause workers physical, mental, and also moral suffering, which is all the more harmful because it is usually concealed. The impossibility of sharing your moral reservations about husbandry practices – e.g. those that cause livestock pain or involve modifications to the body of an animal – is apparent in this study. We find that problematic working conditions can harm both animals and farmworkers – perhaps even more, if the moral objections of the workers are of a sort that cannot be shared with colleagues or the farm owner.

A report published by the British Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC 2007) stresses that skilled stockmen are the cornerstone of successful livestock farming. However, where there is declining profitability, staffing and investment are often the first items to be cut, potentially leading to health and safety problems and poor animal welfare.

Over recent years in Denmark, it has become increasingly difficult for farmers to hire staff. This is an especially serious problem on pig farms, but all livestock farms have difficulties recruiting staff. One main reason for the difficulty mentioned by Danish farm owners is the image of farming (Anneberg and Sørensen, 2016). Farm owners would like this image to be improved – e.g. through campaigns targeting young people who are making choices about the professions they wish to be engaged in. No doubt the ability to recruit, retain and motivate good stockmen is indeed partly linked to the industry's image, as was stressed a decade ago in a Universities Federation for Animal Welfare report (UFAW, 2007). The report found that some experts subscribed to a negative image of farming. They suggested that the image had developed through publicity from single-issue campaign groups, public awareness of major disease outbreaks and a disconnection between the producer and the marketplace.

Some agricultural organisations try to deal with this through campaigns which emphasise the positive aspects of a responsible, caring and rewarding profession. However, we suggest that focusing on the working conditions for farmworkers is likely to be more effective than yet another campaign from the agricultural sector trying to counter negative views of farming with a positive image of the livestock industry. Moreover, increased focus on education and training programmes in stockmanship should be based on a more thorough knowledge of the behaviour and needs of farm animals and the interpretation of those needs. This would enable future farmworkers to enter into dialogue with farm owners and managers about the principles of good husbandry.

In a Swedish study (Kolstrup, 2012), agricultural students and employees on farms were asked what factors attracted dairy farmworkers to work with cattle and motivated them in their daily work. Although the order of priorities of the two groups differed, the students and workers agreed that having fun at work, good leadership, feeling pride in their work, job security, good team spirit, living in the countryside, meaningful and interesting work, a safe and healthy workplace, flexible work tasks, the farm having a good reputation, and feedback from supervisors were among the most important factors. The need for feedback is in line with what we have found in this study, where the employees acknowledged that lack of appreciation could make them take out their frustration on the animals. Values like those from the Swedish study and those the Danish

[3] https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=176997

employees in the present study displayed can only be respected if the farm owners of the future have good skills in leadership, which often will require education. This is something there is an awareness of in the Danish agricultural sector. However, it is widely acknowledged that the change may come only with a new generation of better educated farm owners.

Nevertheless, the present situation in Denmark, with one third of the workers coming from Eastern Europe, points to a much more difficult situation, as was confirmed in this study. And there is a risk that foreign workers will be regarded as second-tier workers as compared with Danes, because they are offered worse conditions than the Danish workers – e.g. lower wages, bad housing, split working hours and social isolation.

Three years ago, Reid and Schenker (2016) tried to identify characteristics of American farmworkers at increased risk of adverse health outcomes. They compared the characteristics associated with adverse health and safety conditions among US-born and Mexican and Central American-born Latino and Indigenous workers, both documented and undocumented. The results showed that US-born farmworkers had more secure work, worked on less onerous tasks, and earned more per hour than the other categories of farmworkers. Undocumented, indigenous workers had more precarious work, worked on more onerous tasks, and were more likely to do piece-work than undocumented Latino workers. A similar study examining the diverse group of employees working on livestock farms in Denmark has not yet been conducted. However, as described in our study, there is a risk that foreign employees are socially isolated, and that they also work in working conditions that are worse than those in which Danish employees work. Animal welfare is likely to seem less important to those who feel that human welfare is being neglected.

Limitations of the study

The qualitative methodology we have used focuses on the discovery of maximum variation, so the results do not tell how widespread the described problems are on Danish livestock farms.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the employees at the farms for being willing to share their experiences. We would also like to thank Dr..Paul A. Robinson for his very useful suggestions in connection with the editing of the paper, and thanks for the valuable comments we received from participants, when the project was presented at the EurSafe Congress, Vienna 2016. A short and preliminary version of this paper was printed in the proceedings of that congress.

Conflicts of interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there are no conflicts of interest to report.

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